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Blunder and Intent

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Unquestionably the most remarkable contribution thus far to the Cuban question is Walter Lippmann's column demanding "the resignation of the key figures who had the primary responsibility" for the fateful decision. The column is written with Lippmann's unusual magisterial authority. Yet on closer analysis I suspect it raises more questions than it answers.

Basically it says three things. One is that the "New Hands" in the Administration (Bundy, Rostow, Schlesinger, Rusk) are responsible because they failed to protect the President against the bad advice of the "Old Hands" (Bissell, Dulles, Lemnitzer, Burke, Berle).

The second is that since the absence of the British Parliamentary system makes it impossible for the President to resign (as Eden did after Suez), the next best thing is for him to fire his guilty advisers, and thus do justice and restore confidence.

The third is that the intent to help the anti-Castro forces to start a civil war was catastrophically wrong.

Doubtless the professors who are new to governmental decision (Bundy, Rostow, Schlesinger) made a pretty bad start in running their first big operation. Lippmann excludes such New Hands as Bowles and Stevenson, and reserves the highest praise for Sen. Fulbright, an Old Hand who advocated the road not taken.

It strikes me as an idle thing to argue out for blame one category of men, whether you call them New Hands or young intellectuals or anything else.

There is something even more important than the loss of face and prestige because of the Cuba decision. It is the question of whether the younger men, the intellectuals who have been trained in the world of ideas, feel there is a place for them in governmental affairs. They represent the circulation of the talents. With them the nation will survive even a few more decades. Without them its sources of energy will dry up, and the nation will not survive even its successes.

"National interest," writes Lippmann, "is that the truth be found and

that justice be done." Certainly the truth is needed. But the idea of justice, which is crucial wherever a crime has been committed, does not go to the heart of the problems of foreign policy. It is a juristic and not a political concept. What was done about Cuba was a blunder, not a crime. The blunder must be corrected, by a people who reflect on its meaning.

The crucial problem is not to speak of criminal justice, but to ask what the right policy should have been.

Lippmann is clear here—clear and, I fear, wrong. He believes that the purpose of the landings was to get a bridgehead for a civil war in Cuba, and condemns it. His policy is that of "containing" Castro while working constructively in Latin America. Presumably he would feel the same way if the Castro regime, breaking its containment, were to engineer successful revolutions in Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela, Guatemala, making it impossible for an American President to work "constructively" with them.

I fear that Lippmann's policy is the old Kennan-Acheson policy, and I fear it is too late for it. The Russians and Chinese enact no self-imposed restraints about stirring up civil wars wherever they can, using the aid of soldiers, incendiary airplanes, and tons of guns and supplies. If the democracies limit themselves to the policy of "containing" each of these operations, responding always to Russian initiative, they are doomed without a shot.

Everything was wrong about the Cuban landings—everything except one thing. The only thing was the intent to help the anti-Castro refugees and guerrillas as a revolutionary liberation movement. Let that intent remain as a flame that will not be allowed to go out.